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ABSTRACT

One of a series of six portraits of high school literature classrooms, this paper gives a detailed, evocative characterization of how one "master teacher" introduced, undertook, and guided the study of literature, focusing in particular on how the teacher interacted with students in the context of discussion of a literary work in class. The paper recounts how a teacher-researcher observed an instructional unit of literature by (1) conducting taped interviews with the teacher as well as with his students; (2) gathering lesson plans, study guidelines, and assignments related to the instructional units to be observed; and (3) making videotapes of the classes involved; and finally (4) writing a narrative account of what had been observed in the class and what its significance appeared to be. The paper describes a class studying John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," and discusses the teacher's role as guide, moderator, and facilitator in a teacher-led classroom in which students feel that they play an important and valued part. (SR)

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# The Heart and Soul of the Class

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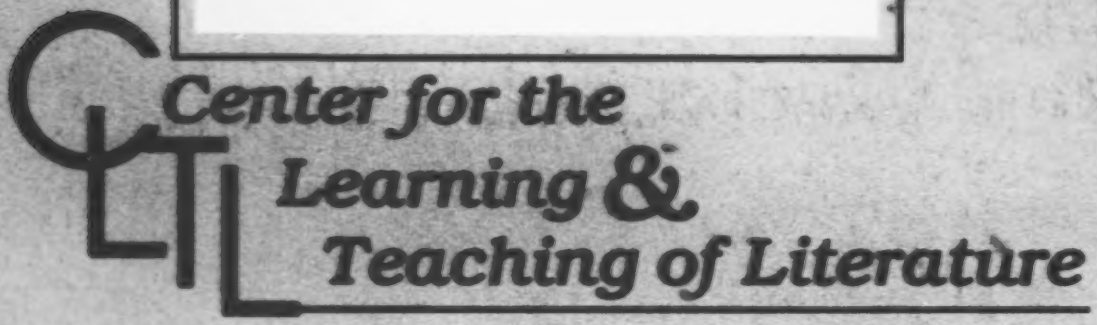


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# The Heart and Soul of the Class

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# Preface

## Overview

The following portrait of a high school literature classroom results from a year-long teacher-research project planned and implemented by a group of high school English teachers from districts in and around Albany, New York. This portrait is one of six produced during the first year of the project, each of which is available separately from the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature. The researchers are themselves all experienced professionals, regarded by colleagues, supervisors, and principals as outstanding literature instructors in their own right. Each of them undertook to observe an instructional unit of another English teacher considered to be equally accomplished in presenting literature to high school students. A unit was defined as the study of a novel, a play, or a sequence of short stories or poems over a period of four to five days. The intent was to compose detailed, evocative characterizations of what particular and well-regarded high school literature teachers actually do in their classrooms.

Each teacher-researcher chose a colleague whose experience and expertise were popularly thought to be exceptional. The researcher conducted taped interviews with the "master teacher," as well as with his or her students, gathered lesson plans, study guidelines, and assignments related to the instructional units to be observed, and made videotapes of the classes involved. Each researcher discussed and studied these materials with the teacher during the observation phase of the project and with the other researchers in the analysis phase. Throughout the study, the researchers also continually reviewed their evolving interpretations of materials with project coordinators. Finally, each wrote a narrative account of what she or he had seen and what its significance appeared to be, preparing the account through several drafts, until themes and details emerged that seemed to the members of the project team and to the master teacher to provide an authentic rendering of the classroom experience.

## Goals and Methods

The question directing the research was this: How do the best high school English teachers introduce, undertake, and guide the study of literature in their classrooms? Plainly, there are nettlesome prior questions lurking here: What does "best" mean? What are the criteria for excellence? Who gets to say so? What does "literature" entail? But the concern of the project was to find out what teachers who are perceived to be successful actually do, the ways in which they do it, and the explanations they may offer for their practices. The attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that might underlie perceptions of excellence were not an immediate concern, although the portraits that finally emerged of good teachers in action certainly direct attention to what the normal criteria of successful literature instruction are thought to be at the present time. Nor was the theoretically vexed question of what constitutes literature an immediate issue, though the texts that various teachers chose for their classes represent statements about what literature is thought to include in the context of high school curricula today.

The master teachers of the study were selected simply by appeal to local knowledge: The researchers, all veteran educators in the Albany area, asked themselves and others which local

high school English teachers have the most established reputations in literature instruction according to colleagues, supervisors, and students. There was no a priori critique of these public perceptions; instead, taken at face value, they were regarded as reliable indicators of the current, commonsense understanding of what makes for quality of instruction. The literary text that formed the basis of class work in each instance was the choice of the teacher or program involved, reflecting, at least as far as the project was concerned, the normal, current sense of appropriate reading material for a particular grade level in Albany-area communities.

The research question was restricted to focus primarily on how a successful teacher interacts with students in the context of discussion of a literary work during class. Hence, less attention was directed to activities such as reading aloud or lecturing on background information, for instance, except insofar as they set up and conditioned opportunities for class discussion. Nor was much attention paid to those portions of class time devoted to routine business matters, "visiting" before and after class, or disciplinary and other regulatory actions, except, once again, to the extent that they might affect the character of discussion.

Naturally, the question "What constitutes 'discussion'?" and the related question "When is 'discussion' going on?" were persistent concerns, by no means easily dispatched. Initially, the researchers were prone to conceive discussion in their own favorite terms, which for one meant little or no teacher involvement, for another involvement but not direction, for still another, lecture or controlled questioning interspersed with student responses. Eventually, members of the research group agreed that discussion was properly whatever a particular master teacher said it was within his or her own classroom.

Researchers and teachers agreed in advance on the units of instruction that would be observed. During preclass interviews, each researcher asked about the reasons for choosing particular texts, what the teacher hoped to accomplish on each class day, what she or he expected of the students, and what assignments would support in-class work. The researcher also asked about the teacher's views of literature, literary study, and teaching. Following these interviews, arrangements were made to videotape classes in which discussion would be a primary activity and to observe but not to videotape other classes in which lecture, reading aloud, or other business would predominate (during these sessions researchers took notes only). Interestingly, no classes featured more time spent on lecture than on discussing the text: student involvement of one kind or another was a consistent feature of the six classrooms. After each class, another meeting enabled the researcher and teacher to review portions of videotape, go over written notes, and discuss perceptions (on both sides) of what happened and why. The research group believed it was important to richness of perception that the teachers have the fullest opportunity to react to the tapes, comment on their practices, explain them in any way that seemed valuable, and react to the impressions that the researcher had formed of class activities.

Since there was no intent to evaluate or critique instructional practices or to view them from some other stance of privileged objectivity, teachers felt free to be candid about what worked and what didn't. Since the researchers were high school teachers themselves, they were able to display the perceptual judgment tempered by generosity that frequently characterizes those who have "been there" and who understand the obligations but also the difficulties of

classroom work. The researchers knew the teachers as responsible professionals; the teachers trusted the researchers to tell their stories honestly.

The researchers and project coordinators spent considerable time exploring the epistemological and hermeneutic questions that surround practices of observing and writing about complex human settings. Everyone acknowledged the necessarily interpretive nature of classroom observation, the influence of a researcher's perspective, the impact of a camcorder's presence, location, focus, and movement on what is seen, the selectivity and slant of field notes, the necessary but simplifying reduction of experiential detail to judgments, characterizations, and conclusions--in general the interrelationship between observer and object observed as it is finally constituted in the textual record of some experience. The aim was to achieve what Clifford Geertz has called "thick description," a narrative rendering of classroom reality, its ambiguities all intact, not a model, statistical average, or other purified representation of "what happened." The teacher-researchers shared a pervasive self-consciousness about interpretation, a desire to offer richness of detail in place of clearcut generalities, a concern for discussing "readings" of the classroom with the largest possible number of people (the teacher and students involved as well as the other researchers and the coordinators of the project), a determination to write narratives about teachers' practices rather than conventional research reports, an emphasis on "storyteller," "theme," "plot," and "character," more typical of literary study than of empirical research. In this instance, researchers and teachers collaborated to create stories of classroom life: their viewpoints converge and diverge in intricate ways which the resulting narratives do not attempt to conceal. The researchers are narrators who do not seek to render themselves invisible in what they write, whose voices are distinctive and important to the meaningfulness of the stories. The teachers and students are characters who come to life according to the ways in which they have been conceived by the narrators. Each story is organized--has plot--according to the themes that emerged for each narrator over the course of observation and talk. Following is one teacher-researcher's narrative. The others are also available as Literature Center reports.

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## The Heart and Soul of the Class

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"The teacher can often make the difference between a good class and a bad class. He can make the subject more enjoyable or more fun or make you want to push yourself, make you want to learn," says Eve. "And then, the teacher usually instigates the discussion on certain vague issues that the author was talking about or some kind of symbolism or something that maybe the students missed...fine-tune the details of the text," offers Jeannine. Mr. Francis Connelly identifies his role in the classroom as "originator...I'm serving to get the topic started and then somewhat of a guide as the topic flows along." I've decided as the sometime observer in the classroom investigating John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath that Francis Connelly is the conduit through which his students have classroom experiences. He is their facilitator, their enabler, their mentor. The principal difference between Francis in the classroom and Ma in the novel is that right from the beginning Francis brings his love to the whole human family whereas Ma grows throughout the novel into that capacity. Francis works hard to accomplish a values education for his students, to address their education and training at what curriculum experts we've worked with label the "affective domain." Francis states that his particular purpose for one of the classes I observed and taped was "to get them to feel what it was like to be dispossessed, to actually feel....I wanted them to feel the unfairness; I wanted them to feel caught or trapped; I wanted them to feel the difficulty....I wanted them to be a little bit angry, a little bit annoyed about the uncertainties....Constantly they came back (to me) and said, 'She's not reasonable!' That's exactly what I wanted them to feel....When you're up against the wall and people know they can take advantage of you, some people will. How do you feel about that? I want them to feel, and feeling is the road into the literature, I think, in this story, at least."

Even though that last qualifier appears, I suspect that Francis believes this about literature instruction in general. In a conversation we were having about the use of discussion in class early in our work together, Francis talked about how anxious he is for students to react. Sure, he wants to move into areas of discussion most teachers of literature focus on, but he especially emphasizes the importance of the recognition that we are dealing with adolescents and to Francis that means that if they're going to get "into" a text, they first have to feel it, "they've got to feel it and to think about it. To them, that means their own lives. Make it personal. So I'll do whatever I can to personalize that." To validate his perception, Eve says about the prereading exercise I observed as partial introduction to the text, "He had set up the situation in present-day times, saying the government held a lottery. And our name had been one of those drawn and the government came to us and told us that we had a new house, with land out in Alaska and that we had to leave the next morning. Each person could take one bag. So he set up the scenario. Then I just imagined...I just sat there and I closed my eyes and I thought what it would be like if somebody came and told my family that and how my family would react to it...Which ones are gonna be the strong ones and say, 'Well, it's bad, but we've gotta do it.' And which ones would be the ones that would just complain and whine and not want to face up to it. And then I just wrote it from my view as the youngest in the family and what brothers and sisters I thought would react in what way." Francis' prompt to elicit this thinking on his students' parts was: Write a description, including dialogue among you and your fellow travelers, as you sell what you can, pack what you can take, and say your last farewells. Please include what's to be packed where, who's to ride where, and an assignment of on-the-road duties. End with a paragraph about how you, the narrator, feel about your new status as

Outcast Pioneers.

Isabel responds:

Yeesh! Alaska! I never dreamed of moving to Alaska. In fact Alaska is the last place on earth that I'd want to live. I will be so cold, but alas, we won the lottery, joy or joy. We privileged families have to move out to Alaska, government select. What a thrill! Today we begin packing, throwing away, selling, and planning the trip. We have to start out on our journey as soon as possible in order to reach Juneau in two weeks--government select...UGH!...

'Bring that couch into the living room. Yea, yea, we hafta sell that, not much we can do with a computer system in Juneau! All right, let's hurry up, the buyers will be here any minute. Come on, come on,' says my dad. It is tearing me apart. My favorite armchair, ...Oh why, oh why! The more I think about it, the angrier I get. I want to start screaming my head off. All this was mine, nobody else's. I wanted it! But no, I couldn't say anything. I saw that expression on everyone's face. It was all the same, anger, hurt, depression, a suffering from the loss of a treasured thing. Every item held a memory. It was as if we were selling our memories away--to be left with nothing, a life deprived of a past.

Kristina concludes her writing assignment with:

For the first few hours of driving all I did was cry at the dreadful thought of what I had been forced to leave and at what miserable events were to follow. Everything I had ever known was gone and I slowly began to feel as we drove on my eyes took on a very cold, hateful look, and my mouth began to have a terribly bitter taste that wouldn't be washed away with water. I remained sad inside, but all I showed with my harsh expression was the intense hatred that grew increasingly stronger towards those people who had made us move.

Thus Francis accomplishes his goal of personalizing the text, to create empathy in these readers. "These were the people in Chapter 9 who were deciding what to take and what to leave, and it was a horrible decision. They were leaving their lives, their whole past history; they were tearing up roots. That's painful...and just to read it I think, might not be enough, unless they felt it a little bit. And while it's very unreal in class, at least there's a little bit of the feeling." And he has very few illusions about the unreality of the classroom as a vehicle for this kind of conversation. The artificiality of the rows or even the smaller groups with a teacher up front, the use of even the inner and outer circle, still smacks of artificiality to Francis because there's a teacher up front behaving in a very directive manner. Even though the intention is free-flow discussion, it becomes at best an imitation of a free flow with much more teacher direction. At the same time I saw what looked to me like a cocktail party type of conversation taking place with this genial host moving from pair to trio to trio, listening intently, offering a thought on the subject at hand and then moving on to the next small group. Francis likens it to "maybe a dinner-table conversation that goes in directions you don't expect it to go. I can't think of any other metaphor that would fit. I can't think of another situation that...a classroom discussion is not like other types of discussion because they're sitting there in rows or groups. You know, what do you compare that to? That's an artificial situation for conversation. And even when you break it up into smaller groups and circles, it's still a very

directed style. You imitate the free flow of discussion, but you direct it much more." Usually the students' reactions to Francis' "discussions" are much more encouraging than he suggests with that response. When he addressed the artificiality of the situation by deciding that among text, student, and teacher, the teacher really bears the responsibility for furthering understanding, for helping students see beyond the text, to see more, to look for things they might have missed the first time around, Jeannine validates his view and develops the idea of responsibility further, "Both the student and the teacher read the text and both of them try to figure out what it is saying and why the author was...what it's about. And then the teacher usually instigates the discussion on certain, maybe vague issues that the author was talking about or some kind of symbolism or something that maybe the students missed. And then it's the students' obligation to really say what they want, what they feel the author was trying to say. And that's when the discussions get going and the text would serve as the base."

Francis believes, without question, I think, that the text, however, could stand by itself, that the text is meant to go to the student in a one-to-one communication. Hence a double artificiality exists: when we introduce the text in a class we're doing something with it that the author never intended, plus taxing the reader by then sending out probes and hoping to add further understanding to a person who may not have understood for a series of reasons: "read too fast, didn't have enough time, intellectually wasn't ready, emotionally wasn't," says Francis. He continues to hope that his classroom investigations open up the text and add more. Further expanding his task of getting conversation started, he is willing to undertake his students' application of their one-to-one relationship with the text, enhanced by class discussion, to other works. He even hopes to broaden their understanding of literature and through that, their understanding of people. Francis sees the characters in books as being in many ways like the people students encounter in real life. By starting to understand people in books a little better and having the vicarious (and safer) experience with the text, he hopes to have his students start to understand people in books a little better, to begin to understand their world a little better and the larger world around them. Within this complicated triangle of self, character, and universe, Francis recognizes the author and suspects that in his one-to-one attempt at communication with the reader, that author might accept full responsibility for the communication's occurring, yet still persists in his effort to secure meaning for students otherwise barred from it. He hopes that through his own experiences of literature, of life, or of reading other people's reactions to literature, that he can help "peel those layers of the onion back to see more and more." What a panoramic undertaking!

There is never a time that Francis is not aware of his plans for his students. In all of our pre-lesson interviews there was a careful articulation of what would happen in that class. When the students arrived after a vacation without having read because spring break was preceded by a "snow day" and they hadn't had their texts at home with them, he was quickly able to work on his planned-for formal characterization study in another way. The ability to think on his feet was never more apparent than on this day. No censuring was necessary; their absence of preparation was out of everyone's control, and this experienced teacher and seasoned humanist simply went on with the lesson in a slightly altered methodology, yet accomplishing his goals of dealing with plot, character, foreshadowing:

Francis: And what were you doing this time yesterday?

Students: Sleeping...various other responses.

Francis: You were still in bed asleep! (Feigned and exaggerated awe in his voice--this is the first day after vacation and it is 7:49 a.m. Lots of laughter ensues.) Over that nice vacation, did you meet anybody interesting?

Jack: Ha! Ha! Ha! Yeah...

Francis: I'm going to ask you to explain that, Jack. You got a lotta yesses on that! Anybody that you hadn't met before? (Francis is interpreting the glances and murmurings among the students about Jack's acquaintances over the break. Obviously they know something he doesn't.)

Jack: Yeah, I suppose...

Francis: I'd like to use that as a jumping-off point. Which I hope you've all finished now (the text).

Students: Laughter all around.

Francis: Finished, oh, yes, finished. I hope you finished it by now. I'd like to show you the movie sometime this week or next, but I want to show the movie after you've all finished it. Because this is first and foremost a novel, and a movie is a translation of a novel. The means of communication with this is words. There's a big difference. The means of communication primarily in a movie is pictures. There's a big difference....You've met some people over the week off...whenever you meet somebody, anybody in real life, you judge that person. You form some conclusions....You look at the person. What do they look like? How are they dressed....You hear the person talk....And then, of course, what they say, what they do, and what others say about them....In good writing, in good fiction, especially, you should meet them in life....A beginning writer tells you what the character is like. Not just what the character looks like, but what the character is like; but a writer who is more experienced, lets you find out about a person in literature the way you find about a person in life....Jim Casey, the preacher. Think of him for a minute. When do you first meet him in the story. He's sitting, he's sitting under a tree. What's he doin'?

Kathyrn: Pickin' his toes.

Francis: Who's the first one who sees him? Through whose eyes do we meet him?

(For the first time, no response.)

Francis: Through Tom Joad, the main character. So through Tom we meet the preacher....Maybe I shouldn't call him that. Why not? Why shouldn't I call him the preacher?

Jack: He has strange ideas.

Francis: He has strange ideas; he's a little strange, Jack?

Jack: He's an ex-preacher.

Francis: He's an ex-preacher he describes himself as....Yet because he has some strange...what strange ideas, for example, what strange ideas does he have? He seems perfectly normal as a preacher to you?

Students: No.

Francis: You've met him though, you're that far, at least, into the book, aren't you?

And it is at this point, about six or seven minutes into his characterization lesson that he (and I, videotaping away) begins to realize that the lesson can't go on as planned.

Francis: How many finished the story? (An alarmingly small number of hands go up.) Oh, my goodness! We're gonna have to put it in high gear. We'd like to have a couple of more. You need to finish it just as quickly as you can. I hope you have some time....

And without skipping a beat,

Francis: O.K. Take out a sheet of paper, please. At the top of the paper would you put down one character from here (he points to the list on the board). It doesn't have to be a main character; put down Tom or Ruthie, or Rosasharon, or Ma. Ma is the soul, the heart and soul of the family. A lot of changes occur in Ma. What I'm going to ask you to do is this: I'm going to ask you to follow one character through the story. If you take your paper and just fold it in half lengthwise, all right, so you can put your notes on one half as you meet the character. I'd like you to put down the page and what you learned about the character. Not a lot, just a note to yourself. So at the top is the name of your character, then below is what you learned about the character and how the author exposed that fact to you....All right. Pick your character; go through. I'm going to come around and ask who your character is. By the way, if you pick Grandma or Grandpa, their descriptions start on 83 and 84, Grandma and Grandpa....

From his note cards, Francis points out the various page numbers on which characters are introduced, adds names to the list already printed on the board for the initially intended discussion; and how character is revealed by the author is still made available to Francis' unprepared students and tomorrow can proceed as planned. No accidents of weather or unanticipated questions by students ruffle Francis' smooth presentation of his lesson. Questions that would interrupt the flow of the plot of Grapes of Wrath are postponed until a later time and dealt with in their appropriate sequence according to Francis' plan. His sense of purpose is obvious not only in his presentation of material but also in his students' consistent attention to

matters of Francis' focus. If he wants a simulated auction of the goods of the newly dispossessed students, they buy and sell at the outrageous prices he has privately suggested to the buyers and the sellers feel outrage and react verbally and in writing to his assignments. His directions are consistently specific, clear, and accumulative. Do this today, think of this tomorrow, write this the next day and the goals of 1) knowing characters and the basic plot, 2) feeling what relocation must be like, and 3) recognizing the characterization techniques Steinbeck employs are amazingly attainable! These students indeed know what Francis wants them to know at the end of a unit of instruction! If they didn't, his sense of betrayal and outrage would equal the students' during their simulation of buying and selling their goods and the reality the Joads experienced in the novel. The strength of the unit's impact seems directly linked to Francis' tightly woven series of activities he directs these students through.

Francis has no problem getting students to follow his directions, including speaking in dialect. In a general interview before videotaping any class, I asked Francis to tell me how he gets his students to be thinking with him. "It's questions or activities that I ask them to do, or a discussion. I might have them act out a part as they're going to be doing a little later. If you were one of the people there, take the part of that person. Start with the dialogue from the book among the group of people and then continue it without the book. It's a role-playing situation. That's another. I could have given them a scenario on writing and said to finish it, such as some disaster....It's all a type of questioning. I would use almost anything; I could have shown them a film of the Japanese Nisei. They put them in internment camps at the start of the war, World War II, and (I could have) asked them what they felt about that." Each of these decisions is based, for Francis, on what appeals to him, or what he thinks will appeal to the group based on their past experience, their reading, their intellectual ability, the type of class that he is working with at the time. This sensitivity of his to the group elicits the students' same sense of responsibility to him. His concern for them and for the outcomes of his instruction is so manifest that they would never cause him the pain and frustration of refusing his invitation to learn, to feel. The focus of the lessons, empathy and character analysis, could have been accomplished in many ways. Francis chooses to involve his adolescent charges, to make them see and feel; he does these things with a constant attention to their nature and development. The learning activities are structured so that they learn from them, but almost more importantly, so that they enjoy what they are doing while they are learning. Their appreciation of Francis' efforts for them is evidenced by their immediate responses to his directions, requests, exhortations. After a very active buying and selling event surely as heated and focused as any day on Wall Street, they could return to their own seats and get into a quiet reading disposition instantaneously. The intentness and seriousness with this? That they attended to the text was ample proof for Francis that he had indeed been successful. They were involved!

I must speculate that Grapes of Wrath is such a suitable vehicle for Francis' brand of instruction not because it is by a great author, and not because we had a class set available and students are not to be purchasing books on their own. That it has enduring value as a classic applicable in many real life situations cannot be denied. The fact that it is American, that the AP people in Princeton included it on some list of recommended texts, that it's regional, or even Francis' sense of commitment to genre studies--none of these seems, in retrospect, to this observer to explain the tremendous effect Francis had on his students' perceptions. Rather, I conclude after reading their responses to his writing stimuli, after tapings and interviews and cordial reception of my request to be an interloper in his class in the first place, that the Grapes of Wrath works as a subject for investigation in Francis' classroom because he is sincerely

interested in the plight of the homeless. His response to human trauma is immediate and obvious. Francis teaches our Thanatology elective, Death as a Force in Life and Literature, as have I, but he does it with the concerns of a professional therapist, an expert in grief management, a loving friend who is on hand unbidden to ease you through the travails encountered as a participant in the human condition. Francis has worked for migrant workers' rights, not as a banner-waving placard-bearing revolutionary, but as an agent of social justice, there to inform the needy of what they are entitled to. He has been shot at by angry and wealthy land owners in New York State, jealous that their profits might be eaten away at if their migrant workers were aware of just what they were entitled to by law. Whatever impinges on the fullest participation in the human family is detestable to Francis, and he is activist enough to itemize an appropriate course of action to stem the abuses at hand. The absence of suitable and interesting electives to motivate the student body in our 2,000 member comprehensive high school, the inefficiency of a department meeting agenda, the colleague who has not yet come to awareness of her victimization as a woman, the obvious hurting request of a student's "Mr. Connelly, I need to talk to you," all elicit the same considered reaction: "How can I help? What can I do to make this better?" Analysis of the task at hand, a studied approach to the solution to the problem, caution directed at the appropriate individual or agency, follow-up when necessary, is the modus operandi of this committed professional. The sense of dispossession, the pain of relocation, the burden of teen-age pregnancy, the trauma of Casey's mid-life (or is it mid-career) crisis--all of these are natural magnets to this helping professional. Francis thinks he taught Grapes of Wrath to his class for the best educational objectives. So do I. That these students came away outraged at being ripped off by a longtime friend, that they could trace Ma's growing concern from her nuclear family to the whole human probe, show what's going on in Francis' class. Francis is teaching--not cultural literacy but how we ought to live, how to think about how we live. Francis helps his students find meaning in their values; Grapes of Wrath is a vehicle these students can inhabit while they examine themselves and their larger human families. I think it was Socrates who suggested that to know the good was to do the good.

I've spent some time thinking about Francis' students' responses to him. Wherein lies his authority? Why do they do as he asks them? I have five classes under my belt as his observer; there are only three other teachers that I have observed over the 23 year expanse of my own career. I've sat in with lots of student teachers in my own room, but that was a very different thing from appearing as a stranger and sitting in on what is an already functioning unit, not of my own making at all. I have pre- and post-lesson interviews, hours of English Center chatting with Francis as well as many pleasurable outside social contacts with him and his wife. We've discussed child rearing, financing college for our kids, approaches to texts; we've swapped professional readings, argued different positions on departmental issues, written curriculum together. He's a person whose opinion is sought. He is the most self-effacing yet dominant presence in our department of 16 teachers. His consistently thoughtful responses invite repeated solicitations. Francis never pontificates, yet his opinions are always firmly anchored--and while never offensive, Francis is adamant about many issues. He has censured me many times for disallowing my students the fates of their own actions. I expected a blow-up, some form of outrage in our early lesson when his students had not read their texts. There was not even a censuring. When we looked at the videotape after the class, I was infuriated that he hadn't been able to have the conversation that he had intended to have. Francis' only concern was that they didn't know exactly what he had wanted them to do on the half-sheets of paper. "As I went around, many of them asked me were they supposed to find a person and write everything that was said about them. I said, 'No, don't write everything. Just tell me what is revealed. Is this

a description revealed through the characters' actions, or the character in words'....I had them divide the page in half so they'd have to write on just half a page as they did it so they couldn't write a lot. But some were not clear on that, and I think it's because it wasn't clearly said to them. And probably it wasn't clearly said because I hadn't actually planned to do this in writing in this detail. That's really it."

I have tested many theories in my mind since those cold February days when I filmed the first of Francis' lessons on Grapes of Wrath. Is it assertiveness that empowers him? Is it experience which enlightens his presentations? Does he know something I don't about classroom management? Is there some model of instruction I'm unfamiliar with that I could use if only I know it to ease my burden of identifying? It is all of these. Francis' gentleness with his students, his complete composure resting on expertly planned lessons, his clearly delineated goals for his students, his methodologies, his single-mindedness during a class, his clarification of what is important--these are what empower him. He closes the door; the students come to attention. He writes on the board; they open their notebooks. During the auctioning of goods prior to the writing of the divesting pieces, his last instruction was, "Enjoy, have some fun, negotiate." Intermittently his voice could be heard urging, "We have an available negotiator over here." As the noise level grew suggesting their completion of the task, Francis intoned, "Please finish your negotiations quick...the stores are closing in,two minutes...please take your places...thank you very much. Would you please open that book up to page 93? By the way, you'll need this book in class tomorrow and Thursday....Would you just now reread Chapter 9 if you've read it already. If you haven't reached it yet, just read it now." These are definitely instructions; they sound like solicitations to me. Francis' second lesson I taped focused on characterization, the very thing I'm wrestling with here. Maybe his own words will give me the key into his character that I need: "You hear the person talk, and we judge more than we realize by the sound of someone's voice. And then of course, what they say, what they do, and what others say about them....In good writing, in good fiction, especially, you should meet people in fiction as close as possible to the way you meet them in life. Rarely does some person come up, some voice from the clouds, perhaps, and say, So-and-so is a wonderful person. He is beautiful. He will be very kind to you. He will...." And that's where I'm stuck. I've admonished my students thousands of times with that dead horse "Show me, don't tell me." Well, this beginning writer has just labored over more than ten pages to tell you what Francis Connelly is, to tell you what he does, to tell you how he does it, to tell you why he is so successful at what he does, to tell you that his students don't mind being with him at 7:49 each morning. What this character says, what he does, plus what I've been able to tell you about him is all you can have. Francis is the heart and soul of his class(es).

Francis is well versed in the classic tradition and subscribes easily to the "things-of-lasting-value" criteria in this Advanced Placement English class. This is not to suggest that Francis eliminates contemporary material. He uses an updated Sound and Sense, for example, as a poetry text from which his students move into examining works that they were not familiar with. He finds lists useful as guidelines, no more than that. The new edition of The Encyclopedia Britannica formed the basis of a history of literature from which Francis culled names of authors, attending to some geographic samplings, some chronological development, American, British, Russian--in fact, samples of major European writers. The short story, novel, drama, as well as the poetry--genre studies--form the basis of a five to six page paper Francis assigns his students in which he hopes they model his classroom technique of a multi-pronged "attack" on the literature under investigation. The research skills needed to prepare these separate reports on an author, one work by that author, and critics' commentaries on both

of these force a depth of investigation Francis sees as important for his 27 talented seniors. The students write up two of these reports, and select the one they prefer to videotape for a presentation to be used as an advertising campaign later on, to sell their favorite authors to subsequent classes. In addition to the in-depth examination of two writers of their own choosing, Francis, an avid proponent of the study and use of television in the classroom, accomplishes work on oral skills impossible to address in the regular classroom setting, and puts it all together for an audience larger than a writer in his one-to-one attempt at communication with a reader. Francis talks to his students a lot; his students talk to each other a lot. Both of these levels of interaction qualify as discussion for Francis. He adds question and answer sessions--never a whole period of it--where he starts asking questions and his students respond. These responses start to jump around the room where students are contributing, sometimes without raising their hands, or simply responding, and they move back and forth freely between the two--he then sees the question and answer session as having turned into a discussion.

Jeannine says, "Anything goes. It's...anybody who has an opinion can go, can just come right out and tell, say, and the rule is nobody's wrong. Everybody has their own way of thinking and everyone can speak freely. He's usually the initiator. He would say something and ask the class what they feel about it. He would ask us for our opinion, ask us for our ideas, and he might be like kind of an instigator, keep it going, keep the discussion going and pursue what we're trying to say. If we're saying something he would try to go into it deeper...follow along instead of having a set, this is what we're going to talk about, this, this, and this." Francis uses the technique frequently, consciously incorporating at least portions of it into the classes I observed an well as most other classes, he says. The students have quite a bit of freedom in these conversations to roam where their curiosities lead them. Francis has goals for his students, but if the discussion in class is helping them understand the work under discussion, or contributing to their understanding of themselves, or others, or the world around them, or leading to the development of some technical, communication skill, or writing, or the speaking/listening process, then he sees that as contributing to his goals for students as well as the goals of the course and those that would be set for each individual work under investigation.

Francis accepts the role of originator in his room. He is willing to get the topic started and then act somewhat as a guide as the topic flows along. The role of discussion leader is a familiar and easy one for Francis for the whole class as a kind of moderator to keep the topic flowing if the students drop into what he would consider total irrelevancies. He identifies the students as discussion leaders, however, when they break up into small groups or even pairs. His fluid movement throughout the room on these occasions shows his skill at keeping even pairs on task. As Francis wanders around, listening--he is always pleased to hear his students--he evaluates for their contributions to the discussion's flow. We have already seen a writing assignment stemming from such a classroom discussion. If they hadn't addressed the task of selling at outrageously low prices to buyers presumed to be their friends and therefore trustworthy, their sense of outrage and anger could never have surfaced in the writings. Francis finds that most times their asides or humorous comments relieve the tension, allowing them to get themselves back on the issue; often very sensitive matters were under investigation in this handling of Grapes of Wrath. The texts under investigation really are a vehicle in Francis' classroom. He says, "I need to pick...works of lasting literary value, and that means of value to them in the here and now." Put that together with his insistence that "feeling is the road into the literature" and I begin to suspect that any piece of literature which would open up opportunity for getting into their own lives presents a suitable text for Francis. I doubt if any book of lists or recommendations of any testing service really have much to do with Francis'

work with his students. Even though he says that he does genre studies, addresses mythological themes through Antigone, and addresses formal elements of the short story with this class, I think what underpins all of his textual choices is a combination of the idea that "an educated people, such as government, law, business, politics, whatever, must know certain allusions to so many things in our society that are founded on the shared experience of the society as a whole." Add to this his strong sense that the students' reading on their own might not be enough to generate their feelings in this unreal setting of the classroom, and you have his decision to personalize the text for them and to generate some empathy through asking particular questions.

Texts that allow the students to act out a part, to create a dialogue from the book among the characters--these activities came to be used in my observations of this class and I think the heavy emphasis on the dramatic (Francis has extensive training in theater and speech arts) is what appeals to Francis. He considers what will appeal to the group, addresses their past literary experiences, their intellectual ability, and the social make-up of the class; it boils down to "picking and choosing whatever I feel will work, based on my experience of the work and the students I teach." And how does this experience get evaluated? "Well, from their reaction to what they're doing. You can see some things in class. There was some definite evoked reaction. And there was some feeling going on, which was good. There was a lot of discussion about it. Which shows that, i.e., they're into the activity at least, and they're responding personally." The consistency of the instruction with the text selection and the diagnosis begins to emerge as a package for Francis. That the students' writing shows that they understood what was happening--and why--sounds like a very literal level of interpretation, but when discussing further the selection of this text with Francis, he quickly adds that Steinbeck's economic philosophy, what he feels should be done for people like this, taken care of in the intercalary chapters, should lead the students to infer what they think should happen in terms of government intervention in economic issues. That farmers are failing today based on government's decisions over their lives, Francis sees as impetus to the students' extension of their thinking about their reading to the whole human family. He wants these students to decide what should be done for people like this, and he wants the text to generate for these readers a philosophy of government and how people relate to one another. If the text can't elicit this response for some students, the activities Francis designs for his students will. Every learning activity designed by Francis leads to another. Each act of interpretation of a text at his hands is designed to broaden their understanding of literature and through that, their understanding of people. "As they start to understand people in books a little better and experience things there, they begin to understand their world a little better and the people around them." It is undoubtedly Francis' belief and supposition, laying the foundation for what he says and does in his classroom, that the text, what is in the book, should deliver a message to the student from the printed page. And he places himself at the students' disposal should the text fail. Francis is purposeful and effective in his classroom precisely because he has no doubt of what his job is: "To see deeper, to see more, to look for things they might have missed the first time around. And the funny thing is that I get some (new insight) from them in the same way. They see things because of their age, experience, and differences that I don't."

Thus the triad is complete: teacher, text, and student interact. Francis' classroom practice is clearly informed by his belief that the meaning of the text exists apart from the reader, that it is fixed in the text and consistent there, and that he must help these readers by passing to them the ideas the author had before he put them into prose in the text under study. Francis has control of the text through his multiple readings, through his examination of other readers' comments on the text (the critics), and his purpose is to deliver the message on the

printed page to the reader-student. By recognizing the possibility of the students' giving ideas, though, Francis betrays his own awareness of the exploratory nature of the business at hand. His own image of the onion peeled, yielding another vision, indicates his perception of that knowledge in ever-expanding, if circumscribed, circles. Knowledge of what the text is about leads to new knowledge. The students move from knowledge of this text to knowledge of themselves, from this self-knowledge to knowledge of the people around them, and from this to a generalization about human-kind. The text is fixed and permanent and the students' job under Francis' guiding activities is to ferret out that meaning by using the skills of deciphering that are available to them. Francis offers learning activities designed to be an orderly process of moving from ignorance to understanding. The questions Francis poses for students are designed for a recapturing of the intended meaning of the writer rather than for registering any uncertainty about what the writer wishes to present in his "one-to-one" communication. His perception, mentioned earlier, that there are many interferences to understanding notwithstanding, Francis enables the readers in his class to discover a meaning in the discourse; there is no possibility of a negotiation between the reader and the writer--only, it appears, among readers. The writer knows best the purposes of his text. The reader's interaction with the text determines his understanding of the subject and limits the possibility of meaning. Francis has a prescription available and directed activities which will solve these students' problems with the text, and he can direct the outcome of his lessons. While continually pursuing richer and more comprehensive readings for his students, for Francis the meaning of the text is pretty much circumscribed by the writer's intention. It's really awkward to say that when I have a typescript with Francis saying, "They (the students) should be able to get it, and if they don't, it's beyond them. But if they do get it, it's great! An author might say that." Juxtaposed with his earlier recognition that "I get some (ideas) from them." Clearly the pursuit of new connections is there; clearly Francis makes new connections with multiple reading with students. Maybe the problem is that I just didn't ask the right question following that response to get at what I'm looking for here. It does sound to me that Francis believes as a New Critic that the meaning resides in the text and while it is not retrievable by all readers because of various interferences, the careful reader will arrive at an authoritative reading, that reading intended by the author. The idea of reading as a transaction between the reader and the text, on a continuum likely to yield idiosyncratic readings, is clearly in place for Francis. Discussion may facilitate understanding for those students involved in the process, and Francis facilitates that: "Even the students who are in the back, if they're listening and hearing and thinking--which they may be--are involved in some smaller degree in the discussion and benefit from it. And I hope that will show up in their writing. I would like to see them share their ideas, but not everyone is as vocal as everyone else....I try to draw them in with questions directed specifically at people, try to put them in groups to encourage them to do that; and we'll have to do some writing afterward."

Since texts are to be studied in class Francis selects ones that offer some richness and texture to the message (he thinks) human beings need to improve the whole human condition. Grapes of Wrath offers a plot about the dispossessed, and the social consciousness of these students ought to wrestle with issues like dispossession. Japanese-American Nisei in 1941, Vietnamese refugees of the 70s (any war refugees?), the African refugees of today are the proper study of intelligent American students. "I'd like to try to have them get at Steinbeck's economic philosophy, what he feels should be done for people like this, because the thing that he has being done there, the people dispossessed because of unwise policies, in which in this case the government refused to interfere in, could happen today, too. Farmers are failing today." And rather than expect them to infer that economic philosophy Francis asks them to

find it as a result of his particular hints about it. "The way the book is written, there's chapters of people--the stories of the people in the Joad family are the people who are moving--and in between the chapters, there are commentary chapters, almost every-other-one, talking about people in general, or about a philosophy of government and how people relate to one another." Francis will not stop with a cultural-historical approach to the book, though; there are formal aspects like characterization to be taught, and Grapes of Wrath is peopled with magnificent characters. Francis anticipates problems with this aspect of the text, however, because of the differences existing between the fictional characters and those in his class. Our students are middle-to-upper-middle class in a suburban school which has become like any city school in the last 15 years. The Joads exist in the dust bowl in the 1920s, are farmers, possess few communication skills, and our students are likely to have problems identifying the characters, let alone identifying with them at the same time they're trying to keep track of what's going on. "This isn't them," Francis says, so "I want to personalize it just as quickly as I can." Steinbeck brings his characters alive and has been singled out by Francis as a model for the assignment I mentioned earlier about a novel, the author, and his times. Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize, the quality of his work, the fact that the school owned a set of Grapes of Wrath and the students hadn't read it yet, "and which is one of his best and we could analyze it in detail as a model for their writing about a character in his times, and his ideas and how to put it together, and that would be a model for the papers they're writing on their own, on their authors," are some of the reasons for the selection of this text. Coupled with this is Francis' researching of their previous reading histories to yield information that most of his students had read at least some other piece of Steinbeck's before. The Pearl, The Red Pony, Of Mice and Men, Travels with Charley offered an existing background on Steinbeck more available to them than any other contemporary novelist he could have picked. Francis has introduced to his students the desirability of modeling in their own writing what they see him doing in class. This forms the basis for their independent paper; the curriculum demands the teaching of research writing. Add to this all that Francis sees as important in the work, some familiarity with the canon of Steinbeck's works, its historicity and its literariness, and he is juggling at least four responsibilities at once in the handling of this book.

What does he want for his students as a result of this study of Grapes of Wrath? "Well, it's a variety of things. The underlying theme that I've hit with them all year long and with everybody I teach is that the basic study of man is man, and that's why we read all literature: that we learn more about ourselves. For the result should be that they understand themselves a little bit better, that they understand other people better, and that they understand this world of ours a little better. Those are the three things that I try to focus on all the time, in everything, and that's why I use the approach I do. So with him (Steinbeck) it's not just as a work of literature; it's the characters as really...as real and feeling people, first, so that they can empathize with them, feel with them. That's the first thing. And once they've gotten that, then I'd like them to look back on, when they're finished, and examine what it is that made this work able to tell them, I hope, is they find out more about themselves and their world, and our world, and other people." Not only is Francis' approach to Grapes of Wrath formal and cultural-historical, it is also rhetorical. He asks his students how Steinbeck pictured those characters, forces physical and emotional connections to be made, checks how dialect fits into it, and then asks his students to describe someone in a similar way using Steinbeck as a model for analysis in this writing exercise. In the class during which we realized the students hadn't read, this episode occurs.

**Francis:** Kathryn, what's unusual about him, the preacher, Jim Casey?

Kathryn: He's resigned. He says "I'm not a preacher any more. Don't regard me as one."

Francis: Yes, why not?

Student: (Some undecipherable response.)

Francis: He what?

Student: Because he's been with women and...

Francis: Because he sleeps with women he thinks he's, he thinks he's a hypocrite to say he's a minister or preacher. O.K. That's a bit of it. What else? He doesn't want people to regard him as a minister. How do you find that out about him?

Student: He said it.

Francis: He said it. "Ah don't wanna be a preachah! Not a preachah anymoa." Tom said, "Ah remember you, yo the preachah man. You used to visit town when ah was a boy, give those hell-fiah suhmons, in the tent! Got everybody jumpin' up and down. Said Allelulia! Ah been saved! or Ah'm a sinnuh! Come up front and be bahptahzed with yo sins."

In our post observation conference about this lesson, as we viewed the video of the class, Francis admits to being "more hammy than I realized" (lots of chuckling) "as I did this."

David: You do act.

Francis: More than I realize.

David: Maybe we all do?...You use your voice...

Francis: One does...

David: As a control element all the time. You create a mood with it; you, ah...

Francis: More than I'm aware of...

David: Portray the roles of the characters that you're looking at. You assume dialect; you do all those things. Do you think you do that all the time or is it just when you're dealing with an historic piece like Grapes of Wrath?

Francis: No, I do that all the time...but without much planning really. I just, whenever I sense they, I feel they need, I do in that regard.

David: Spontaneously...

Francis: Yeah. What I liked in this particular class as you'll see, they're willing to do that. They are willing to act out parts, to take on a dialect, especially if I'm willing to do it. I'm counting on it for the characterization portion of the lesson.

Understanding about other people remains a constant touchstone for Francis. His character emphasis, in the reading as well as the writing, the importance of the students' empathizing come through repeatedly in the lessons and in our conversations. "We're going to look at, later on we'll come back on, let's look at the characters, and how did he picture those characters, describe them both physically and emotionally. What type of people are they? How did he do that? How does dialect fit into it? Can you describe someone in a similar way? And then they'll become a model for analysis and writing exercises." Francis gives his students rhetorical tasks very much like the one he perceives Steinbeck undertook. He asks them to create characters in miniature.

When I asked Francis if he'd pick Grapes of Wrath if he were constructing his own "best world" curriculum, he said he probably would, "It's very, very good." It suits his purposes. He gets to offer an understanding of what dispossession means; that's something that's just in this book. The understanding of other people is here. Understanding characters such as Steinbeck brings to life--who are not all pleasant characters--is important to Francis. "Gramp is a wicked, evil, pain. And he's portrayed by Steinbeck as being that way, and he says it in so many words. The family love him. Maybe we love people not in spite of their faults, but maybe because of them. That's an issue of understanding that can be brought out very much in this novel." To show the many ways Steinbeck draws his character, Francis, in a lesson we taped, focuses on Jim Casey. Telling the students, "a beginning writer tells you what the character is like. Not just what the character looks like, but what the character is like; but a writer who is more experienced lets you find out about a person in literature the way you find out about a person in life....He's gotta do it with words. So he hasta somehow give you a description. He often does that, gives you a description, not of everything, but of some of the things that the character does. It's what the character says, and one other, what others say about him. And then there's the one other characteristic the author can use. What the author tells you about him." So we go through a question and answer session in which the students see what Jim does, how he thinks, his motives, what the author says about him. Suddenly I find myself in the picture as I focus the camera on Francis and his students. "If you were looking at Mr. Marhafer for the first time as he's standing there behind that camera, what would strike you? What would you choose to describe about him? Not everything, but what? As he's putting the camera on you, somebody else seeing you on the camera, what would be the first things they would say about you? What would they notice first? This is called selectivity. You don't see everything. You see certain things that strike you." And so on until the students begin to sense that empathy he is after, not only what these characters are like, but why Steinbeck drew (funny choice of verb for a writer) them as he did, why he made the selection he did. He then asks the students to follow one character through the story.

This text presented Francis with the opportunity for what he called a "several staged attack" on the novel. "First, of course, is to know the characters and the basic plot. The next is to make the kids FEEL the relocation. The next is to deal with the characterization that he uses." And that is exactly what Francis and his students pursue. At the same time the tension

exists in the lessons because Francis knows he's getting some interpretations from the students in the same way they are getting some from him. But he doesn't see them as responsible for that function. It all rests on him, for him. While saying that the author has attempted a one-to-one communication and believing that the author would admit to having the greatest responsibility for guiding the reader into further understanding, Francis still works to be the vehicle through which his students see beyond. Simultaneously, he is open to the view that the student-reader brings something to the discussion. There are four elements operating in Francis' classes all the time: the teacher, the text, the author, and the student. Francis has all four firmly in place in his mind, and if any of the three others falter in their responsibility of communicating, he is willing to offer the most to get at understanding.

The students in Francis' class are the reason for his existence. Author/text form the basis of classroom investigation, the subject matter under investigation; but it is unquestionably the students for whom Francis exists. "Usually Mr. Connelly will indicate by, 'How do you feel about this?' or 'What do you think about that?' and that he wants student involvement in discussion," says Eve, "and that opens the floor for anybody who wants to say something....It's really informal." Then everybody, anybody who is willing to speak out in the class, comparing their ideas and showing people different sides they've never seen in isolation, begins. A discussion for Francis' students is an exchange of ideas and thoughts. The students see Francis as he does; he is a moderator. He gives the subject or the idea to discourse on and then "we take it from there. And he'll step in every once in a while and throw in his own opinion, but more or less, he just lets us have it out amongst ourselves." Francis announced himself as a conversation starter and his students verify that,that's how they see him. Francis has stated clearly that his students offer him ideas, and for Eve, "the students are the conversation. They...and very often in the conversation you, you find out a lot about the people....They'll reveal their ideals or their morals, but the students are the conversations. They ...they start it, they bring it to the middle, and then they finish it." There's a divergence. Is Eve saying that Francis invites the conversation or that he starts it? She says both, but her message clearly suggests that his invitation to participate causes students to participate. So Francis' and my observation while studying videotapes of his classes that they are much more teacher-dominated than he intends is not the message conveyed to the students. My wrestling with the issue of whether or not the class is too teacher dominated comes to rest right here. If the students feel like they're operating in an open forum; if the students find themselves as the subject under discussion; then, once again, Francis is getting just what he wants. By asking students to imagine a situation in which they had to move, that they had suddenly gotten an eviction notice, that their parents' jobs had been closed down, their house had to be closed and that they could take with them only what they could fit in a car and a moving truck, he got them to internalize the text so thoroughly that they're willing to follow the characters in the text as well as the characters in the class--each other and Mr. Connelly through anything. He got them involved with the story personally to the degree that they have their own voices. Because he gives them a chance to formalize their thinking with jot listings, free writings, role-playing, acting out of scenes, dialect-laden conversation, etc., because they get to shape their thinking a little before having to share, they're usually more anxious to speak of what they know, of what they've written. Francis' plans for a given class allow the students time to crystallize their thinking. How does he know when his plan is working? One clear indicator is the response of Eve above, "They (students) start it, they (students) bring it to the middle, and then they (students) finish it." One of Francis' gauges is the light bulb in the face. "The faces light up; the students want to express. If there are more people wanting to talk than we can listen to, I think that's a good sign that (the class) is working. They're involved....Later on as I read what

they have written, if it shows more than a surface understanding; if it shows questions as well as answers, that they're probing deeper than I'd expected, than I had at the beginning, this shows success. I think that's what I would look for."

Both students I interviewed suggested that there is a core of "talkers" in the classroom, but also see that the quiet ones have ideas of their own. They have definite opinions. "They're just...whether it's shyness or just not wanting to say what they think in front of everybody. And Mr. Connelly realizes that and he'll often draw one of them into the conversation. And they'll often...it's not that they're not paying attention or that they don't know what's going on. They'll be right there with us. It's just a matter of who volunteers the most, or whose opinions get declared the most." We already know that Francis wanders around the room, listening, probing. We've seen him assign writing tasks to stimulate their thinking with him or to evaluate. They role play; they react to what they are doing. Francis wants his students to understand their world a little better and the people around them, and they do. And we're back to the teacher-directed yet student-centered balancing act that Francis performs so well. When the teacher is able to entice the participation of even the shy and quiet ones into some very active listening, he has succeeded in doing just what ought to be going on in the classroom. Francis' human interaction with his students precludes reprimands, harshness; the trusted mentor stance he maintains allows for student growth at their own pace. Some students' quieter ways, their personalities, have a great deal to do with who talks in class. Francis utilizes their individuality to the fullest. "When Mr. Connelly calls on one of them, they know perfectly...and it's not that they don't understand. They know what's going on and they have their own opinions. They just don't...I don't want to say force them on, but they don't regularly extend them to others," says Eve. Jeannine complements that view by adding, "Like, anything goes. It's anybody who has an opinion can go, can just come right out and tell, say, and nobody, usually the rule is nobody's wrong. Everybody has their own way of thinking, and everyone can speak freely." This point is where Francis' position as initiator of conversation grows cloudy. Just as it's hard for me to see how he balances the issue of teacher interaction with his students--it looks to me like he's doing all the talking--but the students feel like and identify that they are, so do I have difficulty accepting his perception of himself as initiator when they so clearly identify that, "other people's opinions will influence everybody else and it will keep everybody more open-minded about something. He's usually the initiator. (There it is again!) He would ask, he would say something and ask the class what they feel about it. And he would ask us for our opinion, ask us for our ideas, and he might be kind of an instigator, like...keep it going, keep the discussion going and pursue what we're trying to say. If we're saying something he would try to go into it deeper. Like follow along that way instead of having a set...this is what we're going to talk about, this, this, and this. Instead he would take something a student had said and keep going along that line. Something like that." I'm sure you can see why I can't reconcile myself to the idea of the single-mindedness with which Francis pursues his goals for his students, the unilateral focus upon characterization, for example, while they feel empowered to discuss what is important to them. Perhaps it is their ability to see Francis as instigator; they do not see him as trying to lead them in a certain direction of thought (no matter how hard I tried to badger them into that view during my interviews with them!). They are convinced that they have discussions to bring out the ideas that are in their heads. And there's a great deal of critical thinking going on in these students' heads while others are speaking, too. Jeannine says, "Usually I try to plan out what I'm gonna say ahead of time or else it'll, I'll end up just blabbing on and on (some chuckles). I try to make it sound a little bit organized and logical." At the same time she's trying to read out what people are saying as a conscientious evaluator, herself. "That sounds right, or that's totally off the wall. I try to use

my own experiences to decide what is, what I believe in and what I don't, and what sounds totally wrong or is illogical. I'm usually thinking, judging what other people are saying and try to draw upon that to make my own conclusions, but it's good to keep an open mind about things." It seems from that that Francis has accomplished just what he had in mind from the beginning of the unit, "to help them understand the work we're discussing, and have that contribute to their understanding of themselves or others, or the world around them, or lead to some...communication skill, or writing, or speaking, or listening, then that contributes to the goals of the course and the goals that would be set for each individual work we're covering." Perhaps this is the best that has been thought by classroom teachers throughout the ages? There can be only so many variations on the theme. These students are not only studying the text and the teacher, they have valuable insights into each other. I asked Jeannine at one point to typify the contributions she saw Eve making to the class. "She makes a lot of contributions, but in general, they're like mine, I guess. She bases it on what she feels in her experiences and what she thinks other people also experience. She thinks of herself as maybe representative of a small group. I guess she generalizes what other people feel, too." Could there be a closer parallel to the goals of this teacher/practitioner than that! This student recognizes her classmates' contributions as equal to the text's and to the teacher's. And they are brave, too. I asked Jeannine what would happen if she thought something that was completely different from what everyone else was talking about, whether she would add that to the conversation. "That would be one of the better times! I mean, if you just add what everybody else was saying, then why bother saying it, you know?" Francis keeps all this going in his class while telling me that he's working on a characterization unit! And I guess he is: the characterization skills of the author and the characterization skills of the teacher. Francis draws these students as formatively as any Steinbeck.

The only problem Jeannine finds with class discussion is that she's sometimes shy and not sure that her own views are as valid as other students in the class. As soon as the conversation is underway, however, she wouldn't hesitate to jump in and either contradict or verify if ideas are being bandied about. She believes that it is possible to be too narrow minded. "You always have to be open to other people's ideas. I like to get out what other people think, what other people are thinking. And try to get some...some knowledge or information out of it." She sees classroom discussion which provokes dissension as particularly useful in forming her own critical thinking skills. "If, when I said something and somebody argued back, I would have to argue against the argument, ya know. I would...it's always keep me thinking, trying to justify what I'm saying, always trying to...strengthening your view. And having somebody to, trying to knock down your view helps you strengthen your own more...or to weaken it." Even if we were still wedded to the idea of Bloom's taxonomy, or to teaching by objectives, no observer of this class could fault Francis on what he's accomplishing according to his established goals.

Once the students have read the text--both students agree that the text is the issue, that what is in the text has something to say to them--they also agree that the teacher instigates discussion on certain vague issues, matters of symbolism which may be missed by the students, clarifies it or even rewords it more to the experience and understanding of the group, and that they the students work from what the teacher and the text have given them. Eve adds that the "teacher can often make the difference between a good class and a bad class. They can make the subject more enjoyable or more fun or make you want to push yourself, make you want to learn; or they can make you resent the class, not want to put forth anything, which, ya know, is ridiculous because you're only hurting yourself, but the teacher definitely has the greatest

impact." Both Eve and Jeannine also agree that the next burden of responsibility lies with the students because the students must in turn react to what the teacher displays to them, to how a teacher treats them, to what he expects of them, "what he assumes that they will do, what they will be capable of doing," says Eve. Jeannine concurs, adding, "that it's the students' obligation to really say what they want, they feel about, and the text, and what their ideas are and what the author was...what they feel the author was trying to say." So the students agree on the weight of the triangle's parts; only Francis sees the greatest responsibility as lying with him. I suspect his adroit handling of his students has masked from their eyes the tremendous amount of work, effort, reading, planning, and thinking on Francis' part which allows them the luxury of opening up their text and seeing themselves as bearing the burden for discussion in this classroom.

What looked like a last-ditch effort on Francis' part to salvage a class on the day-after-the-vacation-when-they-hadn't-read-because-they-didn't-have-their-texts-at-home-because-of-the-snow-day's-preceeding-the-vacation debacle when he had them divide their paper in two and go at what looked like a seventh grade exercise in characterization turned out to be a pretty useful and even taxing activity, Jeannine thinks. "It was really...it didn't really use the discussions for that, particular piece of writing because it was like studying what, how he (Steinbeck) used his words and his language. Like, 'looking helplessly' or something like that, 'And Ma slid into the water and rushed through.' He would just analyze...it was an analyzation of how the author said it, not like what he said." Both Jeannine and Eve see what went on in class as the appropriate preparation for the tasks Francis requested they do, especially writings and tests. The class conversations and writings locked into their heads what it was that each particular assignment directed their attention to. Jeannine says, "mostly I just relied on what I had read, anything that we had discussed. Discussions always lock away in my head...I'll remember discussions years from now." Jeannine adds, "We did a lot of discussion on the Grapes of Wrath, cuz it was a large book. And ya know, there was a lot to discuss. We didn't really need to study for it (the test) because we did a lot of, already, talking in class about how Ma changed her...about how everybody changed during the book, especially at the end, how Ma broadened her family. She wasn't so possessive of her family as she broadened her love to the whole human family. And then, after discussions, it just helps that, discussions just help you learn things. You don't really need to study." Individual learning styles are accommodated in Mr. Connelly's classroom. Eve learns first by reading then by discussion; Jeannine seems to take it all in through talking about it and active listening in class. She doesn't exclude the text, however. In summing up the role that discussion played in final evaluation of the unit, Jeannine says, "We just drew upon what we knew about the book and what he said during class. And what everybody else said during class. And our reading of the book. That was basically what our preparation was."

I alluded earlier to the ease with which the mechanics of the class swing into motion--Francis' closing the door and moving to the center of the room as a signal to come to order, for example. Eve pointed out an interesting aspect of their familiarity and respect for Francis' ways of instructing. They write down whatever he writes on the board. In addition, they take notes depending on the topic. Eve says, "When we were doing Grapes of Wrath, occasionally I would jot something down, especially a student of Mr. Connelly would always whip these quotes out of nowhere, and they were really good quotes to know and you could use them..., so I'd jot those type of things down. Basically, I just skimmed through the book again, highlighting certain chapters that Mr. Connelly, when we had read it, said were important to the plot of the book." Again, Francis' perception of his role as more experienced reader, as purveyor of

information about a book for students who will allow interference in their reading--for whatever reason. Even though both students interviewed labeled the text as most weighty among teacher, text, and student, they both indicate by their responses that they agree that Francis is the heart and soul of this class. All three aspects of this triangle must be addressed in any classroom; Francis assumes the position at the intersection of all the points of that triangle in his room.

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